

Foreign Service Despatch

Desp. No. 141

607.1161/8.1055

To: The Hague

Ref: Department's Circular Instruction CA 6473 of March 28, 1955.

For Dept. 13 Action OLI-6 Info: Dept. RM/R.2 EUR . 5 SY2
Rec'd O-15 Other: C^{1A}.7 Army -4 Navy.3 Air.3 D 276330

Subject: Era of Good Feeling (Soviet Model 1955) Hits The Hague

From the date of my arrival here in 1953 until recently the Soviet Ambassador, Mr. S.P. KIRSANOV, has maintained with his Western colleagues a genial, though distant, attitude and at formal gatherings of the diplomatic corps has chatted in halting French or more halting English on such non-controversial subjects as the weather, vacations, the theater, or sports. As far as I am concerned, our meetings have been limited to formal receptions at his, our or other Embassies and an occasional dinner at a Dutch official's home.

In recent weeks, however, as has been reported, some of his service attaches (there were none until this year) have been making advances, under the Soviet New Course of Good Manners and Friendship, to our service attaches and occasionally have come forth with bits of information about the Soviet scene of slight intelligence value to us without on their part, as yet, seeking to probe for their own intelligence purposes. (I am told, however, that they have made such probing efforts with Dutch military and naval officers.) Just before the Geneva Conference Mr. Kirsanov approached me at the French Embassy and remarking that he had had his tennis court repaired invited me to play. We fixed a date of August 2 and the match began at 5 p.m. The court is located in the gardens between the three large houses occupied as a sort of Soviet Embassy compound and it turned out to be a good one. The quality of my opponent's game, however, was not: it leaves much to be desired by any standard. He started the match by offering me a whisky, probably with the thought of narrowing the gap between us, but I declined. We proceeded to rally for twenty minutes after which he suggested a rest in the shade of his secluded apple trees. During this intermission we chatted about trees, gardens, and sport (the Russians play much volleyball but little tennis, he said); of the fine atmosphere at the Geneva Conference where one had learned to discuss mutual points of view calmly and without provocation; the relative interest of the present exchange of farmers visit in Iowa and in Russia and the hospitality shown and benefits expected to be derived therefrom. His last led to the only point of substance; Mr. Kirsanov said that unfortunately Soviet agriculture was not in good shape and expanded production was necessary if the growing urban industrial population is to be adequately nourished and if the needed Russian traditional exports of wheat are to be made to maintain traditional markets. He gave, however, no indication as to methods by which this would be brought about.

We then resumed play and after I had taken three sets at 6-0, 6-1, 6-0, we decided mutually and tacitly that it hardly seemed worthwhile to continue counting the sets. During this time, the working day being over, members of his staff and families and children, strolled around in the gardens, or played open air chess, showing unconcealed interest in our game without, however, approaching the court to constitute a formal audience. After I had observed - and had been observed observing - what seemed to be two stealthy MVD officers in the best movie tradition peering from an upstairs window they hastily ducked and were seen no more. During our game my chauffeur was invited into the garden for the first time since he has been in the Embassy's employ and supplied with a drink of vodka and a package of Russian cigarettes. (Any ulterior motives involved in this were hardly worth the

Desp. No. 141, 607.1161/8.1055 cont'd. from The Hague

Following the game we again sat under the apple tree, this time indulging in a couple of bottles of lemonade - another American victory in rejecting the whisky without offence. He was friendly throughout and was obviously making his best effort to promulgate the new boating- berrying-bantering atmosphere and concluded by urging another match and offering the court for me and any of my collaborators at anytime we wished. He is leaving for a vacation in the Caucasus, he says, August 15, 1955.

I understand that on his initiative he played a similar match with our French colleague and has also invited Secretary General van Tuyll of the Foreign Office for a tennis turn. The word must have come down to play the Westerners at their own games and relax and enjoy it. But it can't be fun for Kirsanov unless his tennis teacher produces better results.

H. Freeman Matthews.